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THE INTRUSIVE NASAL IN "NIGHTINGALE."

IN a recent number of *Englische Studien* (Vol. XXVI, p. 2) Prof. Jespersen discusses the origin of the unetymological nasal in the modern form of the O.E. *nihtegale*. Rejecting, on good grounds, the suggestion offered in an *obiter dictum* of Dr. Sweet's (which, possibly, that distinguished scholar might not now care to defend), that *nizte-* became *niztin-* through association with *evening*, he points out that the phenomenon in question has an exact parallel in the forms *Portingale* (for *Portigale*, Portugal), and *martingale*, and a less close parallel in the well-known and extensive class of words exemplified by *passenger*, *messenger*, *harbinger*. The disappointing conclusion of the article is that no explanation is attainable. We can formulate the "law" that during the M.E. period a nasal was regularly inserted in tri-syllabic words between a vowel ending the middle syllable and a *g* or *dʒ* beginning the third syllable; but *why* this took place we have, Professor Jespersen seems to think, no means of conjecturing.

But let us examine all the known instances in which a nasal has been inserted in this position before guttural *g*. These are, *nightingale*, *Portingale*, *martingale*, and *fardingale*, which last Professor Jespersen has omitted. Now it is a decidedly suspicious circumstance that they all end in *-ingale*. So far as I know we do not find an unetymological *n* before *g* in any other word of the same rhythm, such as *herigaut*, *pedigree*, or *verdegrece*. The presumption therefore seems to be that we have not here to do with any unexplainable operations of phonetic law, but that the sound-sequence *-ingale*, owing to its familiarity as occurring in the common word *nightingale*, was instinctively substituted for the *-igale* of the less frequent words. The process is surely natural and ordinary enough. A person who was in the habit of using the word *nightingale*, but to whom *Portigale*, *martigale*, and *fardigale* were not quite so familiarly known, would almost inevitably mispronounce these latter; and indeed would very likely hear them wrongly as well.

If this be the correct explanation of the intrusive nasal in the later instances, the form of *nightingale* not only remains unaccounted for, but the change which it has undergone has not even been brought under any general formula. A possible solution, however, may perhaps be suggested by what has already been said. If an *n* has been introduced into three other words through the influence of *nightingale*, may not the *n* of *nightingale* itself be due to similar influence from some other word which had the nasal by etymological right? It may at first sight appear absurd to suggest that *niztegale* has been altered by assimilation to *galin-gale*. But the name of the root was probably in the fourteenth century more frequently on people's lips than the name of the bird, for *galingale* was an article of constant use, both in domestic medicine and in cookery. Those who know how addicted English rustics are to assimilative distortions even of quite common words will probably not think my suggestion altogether unlikely.

It may be worth while to mention that (as I have lately discovered to my own surprise) my natural pronunciation of *nightingale* is *nei-tingeⁱl*, with *n* and not *η*. The dictionaries all apparently agree with me, though this may be because of the imperfection of their methods of notation. How people in general do pronounce the word I do not know; the reason why I find it easier to pronounce it with *n* than with *η* is probably that the *t* makes the nasal homorganic with itself in spite of the tendency to be assimilated to the guttural of the next syllable.

HENRY BRADLEY.

OXFORD, ENGLAND.